(b) and (c) The two Defence Ministers had discussions on a wide range of subjects. The discussion did not cover the production and supply of defence equipment.

Decline in the Export of Jute

2041. SMT. JAYANTI PATNAIK: Will the Minister of TEXTILES be pleased to state:

(a) whether there have been a sharp decline in the export of jute during this year;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) the steps taken by the Govt. in maintaining the balance in the export in jute sector; and

(d) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF TEXTILES (SHRI R.L. JALAPPA): (a) and (b) The export of jute goods through Calcutta and Haldia ports during the period April-August, 1996 declined by 16% in terms of Quantity, over the corresponding period during 1995. However, the exports registered an increase of 14% in terms of value in the same period during 1996 as compare to 1995. Export during April-August, 1995 were worth Rs. 189.62 crores and during April-Aug, 1996 these are of Rs. 216.19 crores.

The reason for decline in export was the sharp decline in the offtake of Hessian in USA market and fall in export of sacking to all countries.

(c) and (d) The shortfall in export of jute products during April-Aug, 1996 is likely to be made good in the second half of the year as a result of competitives prices being offered by the exporters in the country and increase in the requirement of some leading importing countries.

In order to boost growth of jute exports, the Govt. has been providing external market assistance through JMDC on export of jute yarn and some other value added items, for effective competition in the International Market. Among other steps, the Govt. has been making vigorous market promotion efforts through JMDC for both diversified and traditional items through participation in trade fair/exhibition, organising buyer-seller meets, seminars and work-shop, spons oring delegation in International Markets and launching publicity and propaganda campaign under its own funds and those provided under UNDP assisted jute sector programme.

Performance of field commands and troops commands

2042. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that key field command posts and troop level commands in the Indian Army are held by officers considered to be too old by military strategists;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the performance of the troops led by officers who had physically past their prime is likely to be affected in any eventuality; and

(d) if so, the steps contemplated by Government in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI N.V.N. SOMU): (a) to (d) The ages of Commanders at operational levels are well within the acceptable limits in the Indian Army as shown below. These ages are comparable with those in other Armies of the World.

(i)	Company Commanders :	27-37 years
(ii)	Battalion Commanders :	40-47 years
(iii)	Brigade Commanders :	48-51 years

Only fit officers are placed in command in operational areas.

Though physical fitness is important in a profession like Army, there is no substitute for experience. Hence a balance has to be struck between the two. The ages of Commanders are within the acceptable limits based on the present day health standards.

Telephone Connections under Asansol Telephone Exchange

2043. SHRI RAMNARAYAN GOSWAMI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that about 40 persons have applied for telephone